

VIEWS BY THE ECHO PRESS

THUMBS UP/ THUMBS DOWN

Business is buzzing in Alexandria

Thumbs Up: It's great to see all the new businesses that are opening in the area. Here's just some of the business activity in the last couple of months: A new car and dog wash is being built near Highway 29 South; a new Pizza Hut (mainly take-out) plans to open on Nokomis Street; a new yoga studio, Yoga Borealis, opened in the upper level of 609½ Broadway; the new Charlie's Bazaar is under construction on Broadway and a proposed bar with a rooftop patio could be located next to it; a new recreational axe-throwing facility, Woodsman Axe, is up and running at 124 7th Ave. W; a new Mexican restaurant, El Loro's, opened in the building that once housed Tennessee Roadhouse; and a new business that grill fans will like - Smokestack BBQ Supply Store - opened at 1015 Highway 29 North. We're fortunate to have a vibrant business scene downtown and elsewhere in Alexandria. And let's not forget all the long-standing local businesses that have built a solid reputation of putting customers first through all the economic highs and lows, and a pandemic.

Overconfident drivers

Thumbs Down: Too many people think they are excellent drivers, even during a snowstorm with poor visibility, or afterward when snow and ice are a challenge. These kinds of drivers rely too much on their egos and four-wheel drives and some of them get into crashes. The AAA provides these defensive driving tips to help motorists get through the winter season: 1. Before starting out in snowy weather, take time to remove the snow from the entire car so it doesn't blow onto your windshield or the windshields of other drivers. Make sure your mirrors and lights are clean and clear. 2. Go slow in snow. Posted speeds are for ideal conditions. 3. Watch for icy surfaces on bridges and intersections, even when the rest of the road seems to be in good condition. 4. Look farther ahead in traffic. Actions by other drivers will alert you to problems and give you extra seconds to react. 5. When changing lanes, avoid cutting in front of trucks, which need more time and distance than passenger vehicles to stop. 6. Don't use cruise control when roads are wet, snowy, or icy. 7. Remember that four-wheel drive helps you get going quicker, but it won't help you stop any faster. 8. In the event of a skid, ease off the accelerator and don't lock the brakes. Carefully steer in the direction you want the vehicle to go and straighten the wheel as soon as the car begins to go in the desired direction.

Impressed with ER

Thumbs Up: A reader was impressed with the care delivered by Alomere Health when she brought a friend into the ER recently. "The front desk, the nurses and the doctors were all wonderful," she said. "They kept me very informed constantly, they made sure my friend was well taken care of. They made so many phone calls trying to find a hospital that could take his complicated case. Unfortunately there isn't a bed for him yet, but Alomere assured us he will be in good hands until they can get him transported. They truly have amazing staff that cares so much about their patients. Alexandria couldn't ask for better!"

Low utility bills

Thumbs Up: Utility bills in Alexandria are low compared to the national average. An online bill pay service, doxo.com, recently took a detailed look at household spending in the utility bill category - electricity, gas, water/sewage and garbage disposal, etc. The report provides rankings of the most expensive and most affordable states and cities for utilities. Alexandria residents, the report found, pay an average of \$273 in utility bills each month, compared to the national average of \$316 per month. With winter and inflation settling in, that's good news for consumers.

The gift of reading

Thumbs Up: The Alexandria Area Branch of the American Association of University Women sends a thumbs up to all who participated in this year's Project Bookshelf. The generosity of individuals and organizations meant that the branch was able to donate more than 500 new books to Jingle Bells. One board member said, "Because of you, many children and young adults in Douglas County will enjoy the gift of a book this holiday season."

No religious Christmas stamp

Thumbs Down: A reader expressed frustration over what should be an easy task. She wanted to buy some new Christmas stamps from the post office that depict a religious scene but was unable to do so. The post office website lists nine such holiday stamps, including ones that depict a visit from St. Nick, others in the snow, two types of Kwanzaa stamps, a Hanukkah stamp and others. But no manger scenes, no Baby Jesus, no Mary or Joseph, not even a Christmas star. Sad.

If you have a suggestion for a Thumbs Up/Thumbs Down, email it to aedenloff@echopress.com or mail it to Echo Press, P.O. Box 549, Alexandria, MN 56308.

LETTER

Fischbach voted against improving our infrastructure

To the editor:
Born and raised in Minnesota, I appreciate many things about our wonderful state, and I'm glad to see it getting a boost forward. The newly enacted infrastructure bill brings us billions of dollars to improve Minnesota roads, bridges, water systems, and broadband Internet. This huge investment in the physical and digital resources we all rely on every day benefits our businesses, schools, workers and students.
This popular bill passed the US House and Senate with bipartisan support; however, Representative Michelle Fischbach, Minnesota District 7, voted against it.

It is inexcusable that my elected representative opposes a bill that supports jobs and has a positive impact on the people she has sworn to represent.

Some Republicans, such as Representative Gary Palmer of Alabama, who voted against the infrastructure bill are now pretending they voted for it. I hope none of our Minnesota Republican nay-voters try to pull this deceptive tactic.

Please remember, as broken roads are repaired, as crumbling bridges are replaced, as Internet access expands, U.S. Representative Michelle Fischbach voted against these improvements in our lives.

Dani Clausen Farwell, Minn.

Is it the end or the beginning?

Now what do I do? That's the question faced by anyone who works long and hard at something and then has it come to an abrupt end.

Lately, I've been asking myself that question a lot.

Since September, I've been rehearsing every Sunday, along with more than 75 other members of New Testament Church, for the musical production of "The Gospel According to Scrooge." Last weekend we wrapped it all up with nine days in a row of dress rehearsals and performances at the Lake Geneva Christian Center in Alexandria.

As we were packing up our chairs and supplies backstage after the last performance, I was reminded of the feeling of leaving a campsite that has become like a second home after staying there several days. For more than a week we had spent about five hours a day back there either practicing, getting dressed, putting on makeup, eating, visiting, or just waiting for our turn to perform. It was becoming like a second home.

Then, suddenly, it was over and it was time to leave.

Although it's going to be nice to have some free time again, I'm really going to miss the fun, excitement and challenge



LOWELL ANDERSON
Lowell's Turn

of the whole production. I'm also going to miss all the people who were involved, both in the cast and support crew. Although I knew most of them before to some degree, there's something about spending so much time together, as well as acting and performing together, that really makes you feel closer and helps everyone get to know each other better.

While leaving the auditorium Sunday night, I felt a familiar feeling of sadness - maybe even mild depression - knowing that all we had worked so hard for and enjoyed so much had ended. I remember that feeling from 10 years ago, which was the last time our church performed this musical production. This time, I was a little more prepared for it and started thinking beforehand what I was going to do when it was all over. I think it helped a little.

So now what? For the past month I've either been sick with COVID or spending most of my non-working time on the Scrooge play. I never really finished my fall chores

and haven't done much of anything around the house except sleep and watch TV. For some strange reason, I never really even felt like reading when I was sick.

But, now it's time to get back to normal: It's time to start exercising again, to resume work around the house, to get back to reading, and - of course - to get ready for Christmas.

Christmas, after all, was a big part of the theme of "The Gospel According to Scrooge," which is an adaptation of "A Christmas Carol" with a Christian message. What the play portrays is the message that money and security are not nearly as important as our relationship with God and with other people. If you think about it, that is what Christmas really is all about.

Looking at it that way, maybe our performances aren't really over. Maybe they can just continue in our daily lives in trying to focus on what really matters most. Maybe I don't need to go back to exactly the way things were but should instead move on to something even better. Maybe I can go back to where I was with a new set of priorities.

In that sense, maybe it's not the end at all, but just the beginning.

"It's Our Turn" is a weekly column that rotates among members of the Echo Press editorial staff.



Echo Press file photo

Cast members of "The Gospel According to Scrooge" practice a song and dance routine during a practice at Lake Geneva Christian Center in early November.

LETTERS

Holiday spirit shines brightly in Alexandria area

To the editor:
Once again, the Alexandria area has done itself proud with all the Christmas lights and decorations.

The city crews and business owners have done a great job of making our community a vision of the holiday spirit and quite a few local residences are also decked out in all their Christmas splendor.

We should all take some time to enjoy the beauty of the season and say thank you to anyone that is providing you with a service and wish them a Merry Christmas. Thank you all for keeping the Christmas Spirit shining brightly and a very Merry Christmas!

Dale Flemming Alexandria, Minn.

Something happened in our town, Alexandria, yesterday

To the editor:
Something happened in our town yesterday (Dec. 12). The Jingle Bells Telethon organization was busy packing about 700 boxes of food and toys to be distributed to families in our area.

Praises! The Alexandria Covenant Church presented a "God inspired" cantata of our savior's birth including our adult choir, children's choir, orchestra and actors. It was amazing and we thank you! We ended the day, in our town, with a talented group from the New Testament Church presenting The Gospel According to Scrooge. It was the classic production, except Ebenezer Scrooge saw the "ways of the world" in his own anger, hurt and greed and turned his life over to Jesus. Awesome!

Something happened in our town yesterday when we humble ourselves to

Jesus and shared the gifts he has given each of us. This was just one day in our town that we were blessed to be part of. God is truly blessing us.

Merry Christmas!
Bill and Marilyn Ingebrigtsen Alexandria, Minn.

With community support, Jingle Bells is making a difference during the holidays

To the editor:
On behalf of the Jingle Bells Foundation, we want to thank everyone who helped make the 73rd annual Jingle Bells Telethon a huge success! A special thank you to Selective TV Alexandria and Gardonville Cooperative.

More than \$95,000 was raised by the end of the telethon on Saturday. This money will be used to pay for nearly 700 food and toy baskets and the expenses associated with the live broadcast. Donations exceeding expenses will be used to support various food shelves and other food-related charities in the area as well as assisting families experiencing hardship.

Many businesses, organizations, individuals and volunteers have made this possible. We are grateful for your support! Your efforts and thoughtfulness bring our community together to help those in need and we are truly blessed with your generosity. Together we are making a difference during the holidays and throughout the year!

If you would like to donate to Jingle Bells, please go to www.jinglebellsalexandria.org or mail a check to Jingle Bells Foundation, P.O. Box 635, Alexandria, MN 56308.

Mike Schreiner Jingle Bells Foundation Alexandria, Minn.